

Legislative Testimony

Senate Bill 246 – An Act Concerning a Commission on Federal Stimulus Distribution

**Madeline McClave, Interim Executive Director
Connecticut Oral Health Initiative (COHI)**

Good afternoon. My name is Madeline McClave. I am the Interim Executive Director of the Connecticut Oral Health Initiative or COHI. COHI is a diverse statewide coalition of individuals and organizations that promotes oral health in Connecticut by raising public awareness of its importance and through improved access to care and education.

First, thank you for doing what is such a difficult job in this economic crisis. We appreciate this opportunity to provide input as the General Assembly makes very difficult budget decisions.

COHI urges you to support Senate Bill 246, An Act Concerning a Commission on Federal Stimulus Distribution.

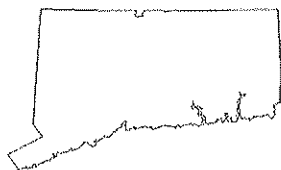
On behalf of our board of directors and other constituents, I encourage you to support this bill because:

- 1) it will help to maximize federal dollars helping Connecticut residents at a time when there is an increase in people seeking help due to loss of income and benefits;
- 2) it will promote an informed approach to cost-cutting in the area of healthcare delivered to participants across our Medicaid programs; and
- 3) will increase the likelihood that access to essential and cost-effective health services such as regular, preventive dental care are preserved for our low-income neighbors, including one in four children in the state enrolled in HUSKY. These services are threatened by the Governor's budget proposals (see attached sheet).

We know that the Governor and General Assembly face a complex task in addressing revenue shortfalls in this budget process. However, the increased Medicaid funding coming to Connecticut through enhanced reimbursement in the federal stimulus is intended to help preserve basic healthcare services such as preventive dental care for our low-income residents. We believe that there should be a thoughtful approach that ensures congruence with Congressional intentions for spending these monies. Connecticut should not balance its budget using these monies at the same time that drastic cuts or cost-sharing in Medicaid services are imposed. In response to basic needs among your constituents, safety net health programs should be preserved not diminished as demand for them rises.

Please do not hesitate to contact COHI (246-2644 or madelinem@ctoralhealth.org) if you have questions or need additional information. Thank you for your time and attention.

The Connecticut Oral Health Initiative works to raise awareness and improve public policy to support its mission 'Oral Health for All'. Founded in 1993, COHI has been an independent nonprofit since 2003. It brings together individuals, dental professionals and organizations that believe in 'Oral Health for All.'



Connecticut Oral Health Coalition

Governor's Proposals Threaten Access to Dental Care

Savings Would be Outweighed by Increased Costs

Members:

Community Health
Center Association of
Connecticut

Community Health
Center, Inc.

Connecticut AIDS
Resource Coalition

Connecticut
Appleseed

Connecticut
Association of Dental
Assistants

Connecticut
Association of
School-Based Health
Centers

Connecticut Dental
Hygienists'
Association

Connecticut Oral
Health Initiative

Connecticut Society
of Pediatric Dentists

Connecticut State
Dental Association

Connecticut Voices
for Children

Greater Hartford
Legal Aid

Regional Oral Health
Collaboratives:

- Bridgeport
- Danbury
- New Britain
- New Haven
- Southeast
- Stamford
- Waterbury

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Proposal:

- Cut routine dental care for the 230,000 adults enrolled in HUSKY, SAGA, Medicaid fee for service and Title 19. Reimburse only emergency care.

Impact:

- ✓ Dramatically increases healthcare costs
 - Dentists will not participate in program. Dental patients will seek hospital emergency room care.
 - Emergency room dental visits increased 12% after Maryland made a similar cut
 - Emergency room care is ten times more expensive than care in dental office
- ✓ Eliminating adult routine dental care hurts children
 - Mothers with poor dental health have children with more dental problems
 - Maternal dental disease is linked to pre-term babies

Proposal:

- Requires prior authorization for all non-emergency dental services for both children and adults in DSS Medicaid programs

Impact:

- ✓ Undermines the General Assembly's intent to ensure children's access to dental services
 - Creates costly administrative burden for Department of Social Services and providers
 - Discourages dentists from treating patients in Medicaid
 - Violates spirit of dental lawsuit settlement

The Connecticut Oral Health Coalition believes that increased Medicaid funding to the state through the federal stimulus is intended to pay for this kind of preventive healthcare and should, at least, preclude having to make these cuts.

For more information, contact COHI at 860/246-2644 or info@ctoralhealth.org.